



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

RE: Proposed regional accreditation requirement for schools providing or affiliating with a prelicensure registered nursing program.

During the regulatory process for the recently approved education regulations, the concept of requiring accreditation of all prelicensure nursing programs was raised. Several commentators submitted public comments on the proposed regulations recommending an accreditation requirement. The Board voted to accept the comments and to consider promulgation of a separate regulatory proposal requiring that institutions of higher education be accredited. At its February 2011 meeting, the Board revisited the issue and decided that it would be in the public interest to hold public forums for the purpose of gathering input prior to developing regulatory proposal language.

Public forums have been scheduled. Input gathered at the public forums and by direct submission to the Board of Registered Nursing, per instructions on the Notice of Public Forums, will be communicated to the Board, and any further action will be decided upon following review of the input received.

PROPOSED ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENT UNDER CONSIDERATION: The institution of higher education offering the nursing program, or the institution of higher education with which the nursing program is affiliated, must be institutionally accredited by the Junior/Community College or Senior College Division of the Western Association of Colleges and Schools or a regional counterpart. Existing programs that do not meet the requirement must, within a specified time period yet to be determined: 1) apply for regional accreditation; 2) submit reports to the Board detailing the institution's progress in achieving the requisite accreditation; and 3) become fully accredited.

SUPPORTING BASIS FOR PROPOSED REGIONAL INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENT:

1. Accreditation vs Approval: Accreditation addresses dimensions such as financial stability of an educational institution and overall quality of the educational institution that are not evaluated by the BRN as part of the ongoing program continuing approval process. Both accreditation and approval are necessary to ensure quality.

2. Transferability of Academic Credit - The most compelling reason for WASC/regional accreditation is the increased potential for transferability of academic credit, particularly to public colleges and universities. Each institution of higher education determines its own standards for acceptance of transfer of academic credit, but regional accreditation is frequently one of the standards. Transferability of credit becomes an issue for prelicensure registered nursing students who wish to transfer between nursing programs to complete their prelicensure education and for registered

nurses who wish to pursue additional education/degrees. In addition to impeding students' academic progress, inability to transfer academic credits also creates a financial burden for students by requiring that they pay twice for the same course(s). Students may also not be eligible for some employer sponsored education reimbursement if the school is not accredited.

3. Focus on Degree-Granting Colleges and Universities - Registered nursing is a profession. An agency accrediting institutions of higher education for Board-approved prelicensure programs should be focused on institutions that offer degrees and not vocational certificates; WASC meets this criteria.

4. Comparability with Accreditation Requirement for Other Professions: Institutions of higher education providing education for other professions, including physicians, psychologists, social workers, and teachers, are required to be regionally accredited.

5. Comparability with Accreditation Requirement for Public Institutions of Higher Education and current accreditation status of most private schools that offer a nursing program: All California public institutions of higher education are required to be accredited by WASC. The majority of private schools currently offering nursing programs are also WASC accredited.

6. Degree Granting Authority: Private postsecondary institutions must be approved by the Bureau of Private Postsecondary Education (BPPE) to grant degrees; WASC-accredited institutions are exempt from this requirement.